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Strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives

Note by the Secretary-General

In conformity with paragraph 5 (e) (I) of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B of 29 July 1994, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the attached report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services entitled "Strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives". The Secretary-General concurs with the approach to programme monitoring and evaluation described in the report.

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Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report reviews in-depth and self-evaluation activities during the period 1996-1997. The report highlights several developments in United Nations evaluation practices. The old system of self-evaluation at the subprogramme level has been largely superseded by a broader and more useful approach that includes thematic and project evaluations and other types of assessments as well as greater inter-governmental participation in the evaluation process. The Office of Internal Oversight Services jointly with the Department of Management has issued new guidelines to serve as a framework for programme monitoring and evaluation in departments and offices.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is the most recent in a series of reports submitted biennially to the General Assembly through the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the strengthening of programme evaluation in the United Nations. Since late 1994, the central evaluation function has operated as part of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, which consists of the Audit and Management Consulting Division, the Central Monitoring and Inspection Unit, the Investigations Section and the Central Evaluation Unit. Evaluation is thus being conducted in a new context in which the functioning of programme performance reporting and self-evaluation at the departmental level is viewed as part of the broader oversight function. As was the case for the report on the period 1994-1995 (A/51/88), the present report, on the period 1996-1997, reflects this broader viewpoint.

II. In-depth evaluation

2. At its thirty-fourth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination had before it a report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives, in which a drastic shortening of the evaluation cycle, from three years to one year, was recommended (A/49/99, para. 43). Five in-depth evaluations have now been conducted under the shortened cycle. At its thirty-sixth session, the Committee noted that the compressed in-depth evaluation cycle had increased evaluation coverage without sacrificing quality (A/51/16 (Part I), para. 54).

3. Table 1 lists reports on in-depth evaluations and related activities undertaken during the period 1992-1998 and those currently scheduled for 1999 and 2000.

4. The topics of in-depth evaluations to be reviewed by the Committee in 2001, the final year of the current medium-term plan, have yet to be determined. The following substantive activities have not been subject to or scheduled for in-depth evaluation during the period 1992-2000:

(a) Outer space affairs;

(b) Legal affairs;

(c) Human settlements;

(d) Policy coordination and sustainable development;

(e) Population.

III. Oversight functions within departments

A. Evaluations conducted by departments and offices

1. General observations

5. The institutional arrangements in departments and offices for conducting evaluations range from well-established evaluation services to focal points within monitoring and programme coordination divisions or ad hoc arrangements. In general, the situation described two years ago has not significantly changed in most offices and departments. In large-scale field operations (peacekeeping, humanitarian activities, refugees) the evaluation (or "lessons learned") function is either well-established or is in the process of becoming properly established. Other substantive activities in the political, economic and social and public information fields have a mixed record, with some solid evaluation work being conducted and some procedures in place for reporting on the results to specialized intergovernmental bodies. Support services are not routinely subject to evaluation, although ad hoc assessment studies were conducted during the biennium 1996-1997.

2. Large-scale operations

6. In the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, a Lessons Learned Unit was established in April 1995 in response to recommendations included in the in-depth evaluations of the start-up phase of peacekeeping operations (E/AC.51/1994/3 and Corr.1, paras. 8-10, and E/AC.51/1995/2 and Corr.1, paras. 16-18). A review by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the implementation of those recommendations is given in document E/AC.51/1998/4.

7. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has an Inspection and Evaluation Service located within the Executive Office which reports directly to the High Commissioner. During 1996-1997, UNHCR published sectoral evaluations on such topics as refugee education activities, efforts on behalf of children and adolescents, security aspects of refugee operations, including security of both the staff and refugee camps, and the protection of women against sexual violence. Thematic evaluations included the staffing of field operations, the selection of implementing partners, the phase-out of major refugee emergencies and assessments of noteworthy operations. In addition, UNHCR conducts project evaluations at the country level.

Table 1
Evaluation reports completed or scheduled, 1992-2000

Year	*Progress reports*[a]	*In-depth evaluation reports*	*Triennial reviews/follow-up reports*	*Reports to General Assembly on evaluation*
1992	Social development	—	Human rights	A/47/116
1993	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East[b]	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	Human settlements	—
			Human rights (follow-up)	
1994	Peacekeeping: start-up phase[c]	Social development	Economic Commission for Africa: development issues policies	A/49/99 and Add.1
	Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development[c,d]	—		
1995	—	Peacekeeping: start-up phase	—	—
		Environment		
1996	—	Peacekeeping: termination phase	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	A/51/88
		Department of Public Information		
1997	—	Statistics	Social development	—
		Department of Humanitarian Affairs		
1998	—	Crime prevention and criminal justice	Peacekeeping: start-up phase	Present report (A/53/90)
		International drug control	Environment	
1999	—	Disarmament	Department of Public Information	
		Electoral assistance	Peacekeeping: termination phase	
2000	—	Global development trends, issues and policies, and global approaches to social and microeconomic issues and policies, and the corresponding subprogrammes in the regional commissions (programmes 7.3 and 7.4 of the medium-term plan)	Statistics	(Report due)
		Advancement of women	Department of Humanitarian Affairs	

[a] As decided by the Committee for Programme and Coordination in 1994, the evaluation cycle was shortened by the elimination of the progress report stage.
[b] As decided by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, no in-depth evaluation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was required.
[c] These were transitional reports that were described as progress reports but that contained substantive recommendations.
[d] A follow-up study was conducted by the Joint Inspection Unit (A/50/885, annex).

8. Most of the 1996-1997 evaluations were conducted by teams of consultants with the support and guidance of the Inspection and Evaluation Service. In some instances, staff members with expertise in the area under evaluation were seconded to the Inspection and Evaluation Service and led the evaluation exercise. In one instance, UNHCR invited one of its implementing partners to take part in the evaluation. In all instances, the evaluations consisted of desk reviews, site visits and extensive interviews with officials of the countries providing asylum to the refugees, the implementing field partners and the staff of other United Nations partner organizations, as well as the beneficiaries.

9. As a matter of general practice, the findings and recommendations of evaluations are addressed to concerned units or management of UNHCR. UNHCR also issues synthesis reports summarizing the findings and recommendations. All evaluation reports of UNHCR have a restricted distribution, except for the synthesis reports, which are made available at meetings of the UNHCR Executive Committee.

10. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in 1996-1997 completed seven technical and thematic evaluations in education, nine in health and two in relief and social services. Those evaluations, along with analyses of statistical data compiled as part of the administrative reporting practices, have enabled programme managers to assess needs, review progress and plan services.

3. Other substantive activities

11. The United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) evaluated six of its eight subprogrammes during 1996-1997. UNDCP also has procedures for thematic and project evaluations. The purpose of thematic evaluations is essentially to support general policy-making and decision-making and to cover functions, processes and normative aspects of the programme. Thematic evaluations have often resulted in a change in focus of UNDCP activities or in organizational or administrative realignments. About 90 per cent of UNDCP operations are funded from extrabudgetary sources, and so significant efforts go into project evaluations. During 1996, 24 projects were evaluated compared to 19 in 1995 and 16 in 1994. UNDCP has over the years established criteria and formal procedures for project evaluations, which are conducted whenever the evaluation may provide information useful for the formulation of policies or future activities; when the activity is experimental, particularly complex or faces serious operational or administrative difficulties; when the UNDCP budget for the activity exceeds US$ 1 million; or when there are proposals involving additional costs of $500,000 or a project extension of two years or more. As part of the project evaluation process, UNDCP has started asking evaluators to complete a questionnaire assessing projects on a number of standard dimensions. This has allowed the Programme to compile comparable evaluation data that are analysed to identify weaknesses and strengths across sectors and regions. In 1997, UNDCP issued an analytical report on the basis of the project evaluation data collected through those questionnaires.

12. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) during 1996-1997 completed nine project evaluations, self-evaluations of five subprogrammes and one thematic evaluation. UNEP also published a report on its evaluation results. The Office of Internal Oversight Services inspection of UNEP was critical of some evaluation efforts but commended the introduction of the concept of performance indicators in the 1996-1997 programme budget, which presented, under each subprogramme, the results to be achieved and the corresponding indicators to be used to verify results (see A/51/810, para. 99).

13. The United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) has carried out self-evaluation of its entire work programme for the biennium 1996-1997. In addition, operational activities are subject to regular evaluations. Efforts are under way to develop an evaluation database that will enable the Centre to draw the lessons learned from its activities and to provide programme managers with an information base on which to make the necessary decisions for the improvement of planning, programming and implementation of human settlements programmes, as well as to inform future policy formulation. To facilitate the monitoring and assessment of operational projects and programmes as well as organizational performance, a performance indicators framework was developed. The Centre's projects and programmes are reviewed by the Programme Review Committee.

14. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs in January 1996 adopted procedures for two types of evaluations, lessons learned and thematic studies. The lessons learned studies document experience with respect to field coordination in crisis countries. Two major lessons learned studies, on humanitarian coordination and the multi-country study on the development of indigenous mine-action capacities that synthesized findings of four country case studies, were completed during 1996-1997. Thematic studies are research-oriented and aimed at gaining insights for policy development and future operations as distinct from managerial or operational issues; four such studies were

completed during 1996-1997. The Department plans to continue to conduct both types of studies during the biennium 1998-1999. It also disseminates the lessons and policy recommendations of its evaluations to the wider international community through seminars and workshops.

15. The Department of Public Information in 1996-1997 completed four internal evaluations that focused on specific issues and three evaluations of its core activities: the United Nations Information Centres (A/AC.198/1997/6), the Dag Hammarskjöld Library (A/AC.198/1997/2 and Add.1) and publications of the Department (A/AC.198/1997/4).

16. The Department of Political Affairs in its ad hoc efficiency reviews focused on cost-cutting issues. These reviews resulted in the reduction of the size of the *Disarmament Yearbook* by 40 per cent, the reduction of *Disarmament Review* from 200 to 100 pages and the elimination of some marginal reports as well as reductions in the frequency of non-essential meetings. In regard to the latter, the number of meetings of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters and the annual ministerial meetings of the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa was reduced from four to two during the biennium 1996-1997. In addition, the frequency of meetings on cooperation with the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference was reduced, with the endorsement of the General Assembly in its resolution 50/17 of 20 November 1995, from annually to biennially. The Department also reviewed delays in the preparation and publication of supplements to the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council* and submitted proposals that were incorporated into the relevant report of the Secretary-General (A/52/317 and Corr.1).

17. The Office of Legal Affairs during 1996-1997 completed self-evaluations of all six subprogrammes in its work programme. In response to General Assembly resolution 51/209 of 17 December 1996, which requested the Secretary-General to expedite the preparation of the supplements to the *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs*, a working group of the Interdepartmental Committee on Charter Repertory, chaired by the Office of Legal Affairs, was established to review delays in the preparation and publication of those supplements. The report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/52/317 and Corr.1 contained a detailed review and recommendations on both the *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs* and the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*. Those recommendations were approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/161 of 15 December 1997.

18. The three departments responsible for implementing the major programme on international cooperation for development, which have been merged into a single Department of Economic and Social Affairs, conducted 12 thematic evaluation studies. Two studies were done at the request of the Secretary-General's Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, which is responsible for policy coordination. The two studies evaluated 10 United Nations economic reports and 7 global social reports. The evaluation of the economic reports, conducted by a consultant, was based on three criteria: how well the reports performed advocacy functions on key development issues; whether the reports conformed to conventional professional standards of economic analysis; and the extent to which the reports approached the frontier of economic analysis, thus providing analysis complementary to conventional wisdom. The review made extensive recommendations to improve quality, analytical rigour and policy relevance. The terms of reference of the study of the social reports were to analyse the objectives of the different reports as well as to identify their target audiences, to identify the value added of each, to identify any areas of overlap or inconsistency and to suggest feasible changes in the orientation of the reports to improve their complementarity and value added. The evaluation study, prepared by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, made report-specific recommendations.

19. Other evaluation studies conducted in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in response to the efficiency initiatives included a review of the lessons learned in the substantive preparation, organization and servicing of the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly. The report contained suggestions to be considered in the planning and organization of future intergovernmental deliberations. Other core functions studied included parliamentary services, consolidation of reports, the content of publications, publication production and dissemination. The efficiency reviews also examined some core internal procedures such as documentation planning and preparation, electronic processing of documents and external peer review.

20. Those efficiency studies met evaluation requirements and were in most instances superior to conventional self-evaluations. An external peer review recommended that future reviewers include both people from the United Nations system, who could focus on suitability and usefulness, and external experts, who could focus on the quality of substantive content. The peer review, while observing that Secretariat documents are not generally the result of independent research and should not be evaluated by academic criteria, proposed a list of criteria that could

serve as standards of evaluation: (a) Is the information accurate and up-to-date? Are there factual errors or important omissions? (b) Does the work reflect current knowledge and theories in the field? (c) Is the work conceived and organized to cover essential aspects of the question? (d) Is the material organized and written clearly? Are technical issues clearly explained for non-specialists? (e) Are data or graphic material clearly presented in tables, graphs, boxes or other forms? (f) If there are explicit or implicit recommendations, are they feasible? (g) Is the publication useful for its intended audience? The study on consolidated reports focused on excessive documentation. Following the completion of the study the Department informed the Economic and Social Council that it would experiment with issuing consolidated reports. As a result, the Commission on the Status of Women consolidated its reports in 1996, reducing them from 14 to 5, and documentation of the Council's Non-governmental Organization Committee was reduced from 2,000 pages to 300.

21. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), at the request of member States, completed an in-depth evaluation of its technical assistance programme on automated systems for customs data entry, control and management, and its programme to provide training in international trade (TRAINFORTRADE). In 1996, UNCTAD, with funds made available by a member State, commissioned a study of its evaluation practices and monitoring procedures conducted by an external consultant and on the basis of the study's recommendations introduced a monitoring and evaluation system. Under the new system, self-evaluations of five subprogrammes established after the ninth session of UNCTAD (held in Midrand, South Africa, from 27 April to 11 May 1996), were conducted at the end of 1997. A Senior Management Committee, chaired by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, will review the draft evaluation reports. The results of the self-evaluations and their review by the Senior Management Committee will also be the basis of Secretariat inputs to the mid-term review of the implementation of decisions adopted at UNCTAD IX.

22. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and its subsidiary bodies conducted a review of the objectives and elements of all programmes. During the course of that review, the secretariat solicited views of member States of the Commission through questionnaires asking them to indicate those elements of the programmes they valued least and those they valued most, whether they were satisfied with the conduct and results of the specific programme elements and to what extent such work duplicated the work of or could be done better by other organizations. The process, which began in 1995 and was completed in April 1997, culminated in the adoption of a plan of action at the jubilee session of the Commission. The plan incorporated extensive reform of the intergovernmental structure and programmes. Restructuring of the subsidiary bodies was completed at the end of January 1998. Redeployment of staff made necessary by the restructuring was completed in 1997. As the final step in this reform, ECE has initiated evaluation procedures that will include indicators of quality and efficiency.

23. During 1996-1997, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) conducted three types of evaluation studies: reviews of the thematic orientation of the intergovernmental structures and programmes of the Commission introduced in 1996; self-evaluations of two of its six subprogrammes; and evaluation reviews of 13 operational projects. ESCAP also participated in the efficiency studies launched in 1996. The reviews of the Commission's intergovernmental structure were conducted by either working groups established by Commission members or secretariat task forces. The Advisory Committee of the Permanent Representatives and Other Representatives Designated by Members of the Commission, in its evaluation of the thematic orientation, observed that the thematic structure had not brought about very substantial improvements in the Commission's work because the division of responsibilities among government ministries in the region, as well as within the ESCAP secretariat, continued to be based mainly along sectoral lines. Thematic structures necessitated a considerable degree of coordination, which was not easily achieved. In addition, since the themes were of a broad nature, there was sometimes a blurring of focus, with the result that the secretariat had to spread its resources too thinly. ESCAP, in its annual review, concluded that the advantage of thematic evaluation outweighed its disadvantages. The project reviews were conducted as part of consultations with donors on further funding of technical cooperation activities. In addition to those studies, during 1996-1997 the secretariat of ESCAP prepared assessments of implementation at six-month intervals for the Advisory Committee and annually by the Commission.

24. During 1996-1997, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) secretariat evaluated four of its nine subprogrammes and submitted summaries of the evaluation reports to the Commission. During the same period, ECA also undertook a systematic assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of its programmes and articulated a new orientation summarized in a report entitled "Serving Africa Better: Strategic Direction for the Economic Commission for Africa". The new strategic orientations were endorsed

by the twenty-second Meeting of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Economic and Social Development and Planning at its annual session in May 1996. A major outcome of this process was the revision of the 1997 work programme, which in turn resulted in organizational restructuring of the secretariat, including the establishment of the Programme Planning, Finance and Evaluation Division. The Division provides a single oversight mechanism for programme formulation, implementation and evaluation. Emphasis will be placed on extracting lessons and best practices and feeding them back into the process and on an evaluation system that relies on strong and continued direction from intergovernmental bodies and self-evaluation. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean completed two self-evaluation studies and conducted a comprehensive assessment exercise of the biennial programme of work with the active participation of the Commission's Member states during 1996-1997. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) did not conduct any self-evaluation studies.

25. As the above description of evaluation activities and table 2 below make clear, the old system of self-evaluation of substantive subprogrammes has been largely superseded by a broader and more useful approach that includes thematic and project evaluations and other types of assessments, and greater intergovernmental participation in evaluative processes. This entire range of activities will come within the scope of the new guidelines on programme monitoring evaluation described below.

4. Support services

26. The United Nations support activities were grouped into five clusters in the medium-term plan for 1992-1997:[1] conference and library services (programme 39); administrative direction and management (programme 40); human resources management (programme 41); programme planning, budget and finance (programme 42); and general services (programme 43).

27. In line with the decision by the Secretary-General, presented in his letter to the General Assembly dated 17 March 1997 (A/51/829), to examine administrative arrangements throughout the Organization, a Task Force on Common Services was established that set up working groups that in turn reviewed the following common services areas:

(a) The Archives and Records Management Working Group has developed and is implementing a common strategy for the long-term preservation and retrievability of electronic records. Through the Task Force, terms of reference were cleared by the Office of Legal Affairs, and a coordinating committee will be established;

(b) The Information and Telecommunications Group will manage services more effectively and cost-efficiently by establishing an Information Technology and Telecommunications Management Committee with its own terms of reference. The Committee will ensure coordination of policies, standards and common services initiatives among the New York-based organizations, including common technology assessment for new products and facilities;

(c) The Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) Group agreed that maintenance costs should be reimbursed to the United Nations by user organizations. The Group will establish a common infrastructure and define cost-sharing with other users in anticipation of achieving year 2000 compliance for IMIS. Future projects include reaching an agreement on long-term governance of the common service structure and its financing;

(d) The Security and Safety Services Group has forwarded proposals regarding common standards on recruitment, in-service training and promotion to the Office of Human Resources Management. A plan for common weapons standards is in the final stage of clearance by the Office of Legal Affairs;

(e) The Working Group on Procurement has completed a first draft of harmonized and streamlined rules for procurement based on current United Nations common procurement guidelines. A comprehensive data profile of all procurement carried out by the different organizations has been prepared that will support the definition and evaluation of new criteria for assessing economies of scale and streamlining procurement practices;

(f) The Facilities Management Group has started a review of its support structure, including planning of office space. A sub-group of the Working Group has been established to improve inter-agency data exchange on space planning issues. Sub-groups on energy efficiency and asset management have also been established. Full evaluation and review of potential major cost savings will be carried out along with a review of possible common contracts;

(g) The Transportation and Traffic Operations Group is working on a decision on a common interactive software travel product for Headquarters and possibly other locations. Ongoing efforts to improve the sharing of information with offices away from Headquarters are under way. Updating

Table 2
Evaluations of substantive activities during the period 1992-1997

Major programme	*Period 1992-1995*	*Biennium 1996-1997*		
	Subprogrammes evaluated	*Subprogrammes evaluated*	*Thematic evaluations*	*Project evaluations*
I. Maintenance of peace and security, disarmament and decolonization	—	[a]	1	—
II. Implementation, codification and progressive development of international law	—	6	—	—
III. International cooperation for development	34	24	16	47
IV. Regional cooperation for economic and social development	30	8	2	13
V. Human rights, fundamental freedoms and humanitarian affairs	7	—	27	12[b]
VI. Public information	—	3	4	—
Total	**71**[c]	**41**[d]	**50**	**72**

[a] Excludes Department of Peacekeeping Operations lessons learned studies.

[b] Excludes UNHCR project evaluations at the country level.

[c] A total of 119 subprogrammes were originally scheduled for self-evaluation for the period 1992-1995 (A/51/88, table 2).

[d] A total of 131 subprogrammes were either originally scheduled for self-evaluation during 1996-1997 or were rescheduled from prior bienniums during 1992-1995 (A/51/88, table 3). Changes to the medium-term plan for 1992-1997 approved by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-fourth session (see *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/49/16), paras. 36-95 took effect in the biennium 1996-1997. Those changes resulted in a reduction in the number of subprogrammes and a redefinition of some of them.

the Web pages with regard to travel- and transportation-related matters is being carried out.

28. The following other support offices of the Department of Management also conducted ad hoc reviews of their core functions:

(a) The oversight support unit of the Office of the Under-Secretary-General, Department of Management, reviewed the terms and conditions of cooperation with the European Commission. This resulted in negotiations with the Commission on standard clauses governing the essential conditions of such cooperation. The Office also analysed the support provided by the Department of Management to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and modalities of cooperation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

(b) The Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts reviewed and made a number of changes in budget presentation. A list of outputs deferred, postponed or curtailed in the biennium 1996-1997 was included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.[2] An explanation of the basic concepts involved in results-based budgeting was provided in document A/51/950/Add.6.

(c) In the area of accounts, process improvement workshops were conducted to improve invoice and inter-office voucher processing, particularly with the aim of reducing the time between receiving invoices and making payments. Measures were also taken, together with the Field Administration and Logistics Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, to ensure that the recorded expenditures in peacekeeping performance reports were consistent with the financial statements.

(d) The Office of Human Resources Management undertook a review of the implementation of various elements of the human resources strategy proposed to the General Assembly in document A/C.5/49/5. A report on the implementation of that strategy was presented to the General Assembly in document A/C.5/51/1. The Performance Appraisal System, which was initiated in 1996, was reviewed upon completion of the first cycle. The Office also

conducted a process review of the language proficiency examination, which led to a streamlining of procedures, and reassessed the system for allocating training resources to departments, which resulted in their decentralized management. A general review of the administration and application of mission subsistence allowance payments at peacekeeping missions resulted in the implementation of a revised policy. In the light of comments made by the General Assembly and the current level of local salaries at non-headquarters duty stations, the Office of Human Resources Management, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme, reviewed the methodologies and presented to the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) recommendations for determining the best prevailing conditions of employment; the new methodology was promulgated by ICSC on 23 December 1997.

29. The Office of Conference and Support Services (now the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) during 1996-1997 conducted internal reviews that established a number of procedures designed to increase efficiency. These included the establishment of a documentation focal point in order to improve coordination between author departments and conference services in documentation preparation and submission; the preparation and circulation of rolling lists of already mandated reports to enable legislative bodies to make informed decisions on additional reports and meetings; the preparation of a working paper examining all topics, agenda items and recurring reports considered by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly; and a review of the language-related services to take full advantage of productivity-increasing recent technological developments. That review also led to an agreement among the editorial, verbatim reporting and translation services on the organization of a common examination for the recruitment of future language officers.

B. Findings on departmental oversight in reports of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

1. Substantive activities

30. The findings of inspections conducted during the period 1993-1995 and described in the previous report (see A/51/88, table 5 and para. 19), indicated weaknesses in oversight functions. These included a lack of any system of evaluation (the Centre for Human Rights), dispersal of the oversight mechanism (ECA, ESCWA and UNCTAD) and ineffectual use of the evaluation process and its results as a management tool (ECE). Further inspections conducted during the period 1996-1997, of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), UNEP, the International Trade Centre and the United Nations Office at Nairobi, revealed similar deficiencies (see A/52/426, paras. 129-141). The practical conclusion to be drawn from these findings of inspections is that appropriate institutional settings need to be in place as prerequisites for improved departmental oversight.

2. Support services

31. In addition to financial audits of common and support services, the Office of Internal Oversight Services has now begun to conduct management audits, which should contribute to the formulation of normative standards for United Nations support services. A 1997 management audit of the recruitment process, using the Office of Human Resources Management recruitment tracking database as the source, showed that the average time it took to recruit a staff member was 460 days. It is quite clear that 460 days is not an acceptable average time for recruitment, and that management needs to conduct an analysis of the delays at each stage of the process and to develop appropriate norms for those stages.

32. The challenge in support activities over the next few years will be to establish norms and standards and performance indicators that can provide an analytical basis for performance monitoring and assessments.

C. Guidelines

1. Guidelines on programme monitoring and evaluation in departments and offices

33. In March 1997 the Office of Internal Oversight Services circulated to all offices and departments of the Secretariat draft monitoring and evaluation guidelines. The guidelines were revised in the light of comments received and were issued under the joint signature of the heads of the Office and the Department of Management in November 1997.

34. The drafting and issuance of the guidelines coincided with the Secretary-General's reform initiatives. Track-one measures of the reform process, such as streamlining of administrative procedures, greater delegation of responsibilities to programme managers and enhancing transparency and flexibility in delineating mandates for the use of resources, require well-designed mechanisms of internal monitoring and control procedures. The guidelines

established a framework for results-based monitoring and evaluation in departments and offices.

35. The guidelines specify three types of broad managerial responsibilities, which constitute minimum monitoring and evaluation standards for the heads of departments and offices, namely:

(a) Establishing a system for monitoring the progress of all assigned work against schedules and norms;

(b) Making a concerted effort to identify the main users of completed work and to keep track of the use they make of it and their reactions to it;

(c) Conducting critical reviews at least once every four years (that is, within the period covered by the medium-term plan) of the efficiency of each major activity and the effectiveness of its results.

36. At present, as the Office's inspection and audit reports show, these responsibilities are not adequately carried out in many offices and departments, particularly those concerned with support services.

37. The guidelines should be seen as part of the broad reform of the way in which the United Nations does business. Their aim is to help managers shift from a relatively passive emphasis on administrative procedures to a more active concern with client satisfaction and results. This is the direction that reforms in the national administrations of many Member States have taken in the last decade or so. The guidelines are an attempt to establish some minimal standards for this new style of public sector management as it needs to be applied at the United Nations.

2. Training and other services of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

38. To help departments and offices implement the guidelines, the Office is offering assistance in the form of monitoring software and training workshops. The first training workshop was given at ESCAP in December 1997. Following a series of workshops covering all major departments and duty stations, an evaluation manual based on the training materials developed in the workshops will be published on the Office's web site.

(Signed) Karl Th. **Paschke**
Under-Secretary-General
for Internal Oversight Services

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/45/6/Rev.1).

[2] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/52/6/Rev.1 and Add.1).